

Easter April 24, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

All week long I have been looking at the events we are celebrating this week through the eyes of various gospel characters, Mary of Bethany, Peter and Judas, the 12 and the beloved disciple. We have now come to Easter, and I can't think of a better way to look at the Resurrection than through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. She is the woman from whom Jesus expelled 7 demons, and is one of the women who helped minister to the needs of Jesus and the disciples. She was not the sinful woman in Luke who anointed the feet of Jesus. Unfortunately throughout history she has often been connected with the sinful woman. These past few days Mary Magdalene has stood out as the outstanding disciple of Jesus. The male disciples fell asleep on him, betrayed and denied him, and ran away and hid. It was Mary who was present for the crucifixion and burial and resurrection of Jesus. All four of the evangelists attest to this.

But it is the resurrection that we are interested in today. In our gospel tonight Mary Magdalene and another Mary go to the tomb and find the stone rolled back from the tomb, and the angel told them "Do not be afraid! I know you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said." They are invited to look into the tomb, and then sent to announce this to the disciples. On the way Jesus meets them, they embrace his feet, and he sends them to the disciples.

A beautiful account, but I believe tomorrow morning's account is even more beautiful. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone, finds that the stone has been removed and runs to tell Peter and the beloved disciple. They immediately run to the tomb, find it empty, with our lord's clothes lying there, and they leave the tomb and return home. If we continue reading from the 4th gospel it becomes more beautiful. Mary returns to the tomb, weeping. The angels ask her why she is weeping, and she explains that Jesus has died and someone has stolen his body. She turns and sees Jesus, but thinks he is the gardener, and asks him where they have laid the body of Jesus. He calls her by name, "Mary", and her eyes are opened, she believes and calls out "Rabbouni," or master. He then sends her off to report to the disciples.

What can we learn from Mary Magdalene? First of all I believe that it was Mary's great love for the lord that enabled her to be present at all of these crucial scenes, the crucifixion, the burial, and she was the first to experience the resurrected lord. All the gospels testify to that. It is our love of the lord that will get us through crucifixion and burial to the resurrection.

A second point. Mary has been called the Apostle to the apostles. She was the one sent to announce the good news, the greatest news, that Jesus had risen and was alive. She could not contain herself, so great was her joy. We too are sent to proclaim this good news, to witness about our love of the lord and our overwhelming joy shared with those we encounter.

There is one final point. Everyone comes to church on Easter, even those who rarely come. I think that is great, and I welcome everyone. But notice, in the gospel Mary returned to the tomb, and hung around the tomb, hoping to find the lord. If she had left like the others, she would have missed the risen lord. How important it is that we hang around, yes, hang around the church, as imperfect as it is at times. For if we hang around, we have a chance to meet our risen lord. That is what Easter, that is what the Christian life is all about.